

REPORT TO THE BOARD OF FISHERIES,
SOUTHEAST SHRIMP OTTER TRAWL FISHERY



By

Timothy Koeneman
and
Catherine A. Botelho

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INTRODUCTION

The otter trawl fishery targeted primarily pink shrimp *Pandalus borealis*, and secondarily, the larger sidestripe shrimp *Pandalopsis dispar*. Other species captured incidentally and landed in smaller quantities were the coonstripe shrimp *Pandalus goniurus*; humpy shrimp *P. hypsinotus*, and the spot prawn *P. platycerous*. Otter trawl gear was prohibited in Southeast Alaska waters as of May, 1998 by action of the Alaska Board of Fisheries.

When compared to beam trawls, otter trawls are generally larger, more complex in construction, double-bridled, and fish best on smooth, level substrate. They are dynamic trawls which rely on bridle and "otter boards" to deploy, position, and maintain the opening dimensions of the net. "Roller gear" can be added, enabling otter trawls to fish on rougher habitat. The design and size allows much greater fishing power than beam trawls, considering similar length vessels. Otter trawl vessels are generally larger and more modern, with large hold capacities, and engines with larger horsepower ratings. Otter trawl vessels utilize many shrimp fishing grounds in the North Pacific. Most of the historical harvest in Southeast Alaska occurred in Glacier Bay and other portions of District 14. Smaller harvests occurred near Ketchikan, Juneau, and Petersburg. Major processors and markets were as distant as Kodiak and Seward. Large harvester-processors expressed interest in fishing both inside and outside waters.

FISHERY DEVELOPMENT AND HISTORY

The first recorded commercial shrimp otter trawl landing from Southeast Alaska waters occurred in 1975 (Table 4.1). Since then, there were eight seasons with no otter trawl harvests reported in Southeast Alaska, and eleven seasons when effort was so low that harvests are confidential. The peak harvest of 145,286 pounds from 11 landings occurred during the 1980/81 season. Most of this harvest occurred in Glacier Bay from larger vessels transiting through Southeast Alaska to the Westward Region to participate in spring shrimp fisheries. Most of the product was processed in Kodiak. Glacier Bay contributed the most significant portion of this harvest. During only two other seasons, 1993/94 and 1997/98 has effort been sufficient to provide significant harvests. The 1997/98 season was the last fishing period when otter trawling was legal. The lack of abundant resource and processing facilities slowed the expansion of the fishery into many geographic locations. With the exception of past fisheries in Glacier Bay by larger vessels, the majority of recent participants were relatively small vessels using small nets.

REGULATION DEVELOPMENT

Otter trawling was prohibited on some grounds traditionally utilized by beam trawl vessels (District 8, portions of Districts 6 and 10) and in Lituya Bay by state regulations through the 1997/98 season, and in Glacier Bay by National Park Service regulations. Until the 1995/96 season the remainder of Southeast

Alaska was open throughout the fishing year with no restriction on mesh size or maximum opening dimensions, or established guideline harvest range. Until the repeal of otter trawls as a legal gear type in Southeast Alaska, otter trawl fishing seasons began on May 1 and closed on February 14. Interest from larger harvester/processors and potential conflicts with other gear users were instrumental in the closure of all districts without a history of consistent and substantial effort or harvest. Open fishing areas and guideline harvest ranges were from 25,000 to 100,000 pounds for Districts 3, 5, and 6 south of a line from Mitchell Point to Point St. John; Districts 7, 9, and 10 west of the longitude of Cape Fanshaw; and District 11. All participants in this fishery had to register prior to fishing and complete logbooks.

LIMITED ENTRY

In late 1996, the Commercial Fisheries Entry Commission published a proposal to limit entry into the shrimp otter trawl fishery with a maximum number of permits of 6. To qualify for a permit, an applicant must have fished during at least one of the qualifying years from 1993 to 1996. The consideration to limit entry into the trawl shrimp fishery spawned participation in the fishery during 1996/97 and 1997/98 seasons, even though participation in 1997 would not qualify an applicant for more participation credit under a limited entry point system.

The BOF subsequently eliminated shrimp otter trawl gear as a legal gear in Southeast Alaska at the January 1997 meeting. In February, the CFEC decided to postpone its decision on entry limitation in the otter trawl fishery until late June 1997 and allow further public comment. In response to letters and petitions, the BOF considered their regulatory action again during an October 1997 work session but did not rescind their decision. The CFEC moved forward with limited entry, with a one-time only application period of December 1998 through March of 1999. A total of 5 applications were received.

FUTURE SEASON SYNOPSIS

Current regulations do not provide for a shrimp otter trawl fishery in Southeast Alaska. If the fishery is to be allowed at a future date, it would have to be well controlled, restricted to limited grounds, use habitat friendly gear specifications, and work under by-catch restrictions of other important commercial species. The potential for a large-scale in-side water fishery is very low.

Table 4.1. Statistical Area A (Southeast Alaska) shrimp otter trawl fishery harvest, number of landings, and CPUE (pounds-per-landing), 1975/76 to present.

Year/ Season	Catch in Pounds	Number of Landings	Pounds Per Landing	Number of Permits	Pounds Per Permits
1975/76	*	*	*	*	*
1976/77	*	*	*	*	*
1977/78	0	0	0	0	0
1978/79	0	0	0	0	0
1979/80	*	*	*	*	*
1980/81	145,286	11	13,208	3	48,429
1981/82	*	*	*	*	*
1982/83	*	*	*	*	*
1983/84	*	*	*	*	*
1984/85	0	0	0	0	0
1985/86	0	0	0	0	0
1986/87	*	*	*	*	*
1987/88	*	*	*	*	*
1988/89	0	0	0	0	0
1989/90	0	0	0	0	0
1990/91	0	0	0	0	0
1991/92	*	*	*	*	*
1992/93	*	*	*	*	*
1993/94	17,599	4	4,400	3	5,866
1994/95	*	*	*	*	*
1995/96	0	0	0	0	0
1996/97	3,801	22	173	9	422
1997/98 ^a	66,381	34	1,952	9	7,376
1998/99	Otter Trawls Eliminated as a Gear Type in Southeast Alaska				

^a Most recent season's data should be considered preliminary.

* Where number of permits participating is less than three, information is confidential.